

HOW WE CAN HELP CHILDREN TO PRAY

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E. E. READ MUMFORD

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**HOW WE CAN HELP CHILDREN
TO PRAY**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE DAWN OF CHARACTER IN THE CHILD.

THE DAWN OF RELIGION IN THE MIND OF THE
CHILD.

JESUS CHRIST: HIS LIFE AND TEACHING.

HOW WE CAN HELP CHILDREN TO PRAY

BY

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CHAPTER I

PREPARING TO HELP

"CAN you help me, Mother?" Lewis pleaded "I can't do these sums by myself." For half-an-hour, with furrowed brows and anxious face, the little lad had been sitting poring over his work.

It was subtraction sums which were troubling him. By what method was subtraction now taught? She herself used to "borrow and pay back" in some mysterious manner. But she had been watching him while she sewed. He was certainly not attempting to do them as she used to do them. "You're tired now and you've lost heart a bit," she said. "Run and play and I'll help you after tea."

A few doors off lived a friend who was a teacher. From her she learnt the new method, and was thrilled with its simplicity and with its reasonableness!

After tea, the two of them set to work. Where lay his difficulty exactly? she wondered. Had he grasped the meaning of number—the principle of notation on which all the rest depended? "Suppose you were taking twenty-six from forty-three," she said, "what do the numbers two and six stand for?" "The two is in the ten's column," he answered quickly, "and the six is in the units' column." "What are 'units'?" she asked. She could see by his expression that he wasn't clear. She found a box of beads and some wire, they counted some of them

out in tens, threaded them on bits of wire, and bent over the ends of the wire so that each group of ten beads made one whole. With four groups of ten and three separate beads they made up the one number—forty-three. In a similar way they made twenty-six. Putting the tens-group in one column and the separate beads in another, with a ruler to divide them, they set to work to “subtract.” “Six from three?” That was impossible. “Suppose then we take one of the tens and put it with the three on the right-hand side of the ruler and try again. Can you take the six from the ten?” “Yes. It leaves four.” “Right, but we mustn’t forget that we have got three more beads there as well, must we? How many are left altogether when we subtract?” “Seven,” he said. And they put seven beads at the bottom in the right hand column which contained the separate beads or the “ones.” “Now for the tens column? How many are we to put there?” “One,” he said, “because two from three leaves one!” “Then twenty-six from forty-three leaves?” she asked—“Seventeen,” he cried: and there was eagerness in his tone.

Still working with beads, they did one sum after another, till the whole process became quite plain. The “tens” column and the “ones”—or units-column—had no confusion for him now. Even a “hundreds column” and a “thousands column” were clear to him. What fun it all was! “Aren’t we enjoying ourselves, Mother?” he said.

Even a little sum took a long while, however, doing it in this way. “Do we need to count out beads any

longer?" suggested his mother. "Won't numbers do for us instead? It's so much quicker with numbers!"

So with numbers only, he worked an easy sum—writing above each column what it contained. Twenty-nine from fifty-two? Nine could not be taken from two, then one of the five tens must be used. So a dot was put over the five as a reminder that now there were only four. Easily and correctly he found the answer. Two or three more two-figured examples, then three-figured sums. And then, at last, he began on one of the harder sums set for homework—two thousand, five hundred and sixty-eight to be subtracted from five thousand, eight hundred and twenty-four. Where was the difficulty? None, now that he really understood. "I do *love* subtraction, Mother!" he said.

Her interest had kindled his. She had been able to help him, firstly because she understood and secondly because she had succeeded in arousing his interest.

In the County of Dorsetshire an experiment known as the Little Commonwealth was started by Mr. Homer Lane for the reformation of difficult and delinquent children. Mary, fifteen years old, was a member of the Commonwealth. During all the time she had spent at school she had never been able to learn either to read or to write, although, according to Mr. Lane, the child was a "genius." She had been there a fortnight, when one day she wandered into the office where Mr. Lane was working.

A big black cat was lying full length on the rug, luxuriating in the warmth of the fire. "Look at that cat, isn't he enjoying himself?" said Mary. "Cat?" said Mr. Lane, "Cat? What do you mean by 'cat'?" "Cat? Cat?" he went on, "What of it? Why 'Cat'?"—until, by the constant repetition of the word in a tone suggestive of strangeness, it gradually ceased almost to convey a meaning. When in this way he had thoroughly mystified the child, he took a piece of paper and printed on it in large letters the word CAT. "Take that to Polly. Don't say anything. Just see what she says," he said. Mary took it across. Polly glanced at it. "Cat? Well, what about it?" she said, looking at the cat on the hearth. "Now show it to Thomas," Mr. Lane said. Thomas evidently regarded the whole thing as absurd—"Cat! Well, I know the cat's there, what about it?" he said in an irritable voice. Mr. Lane took another sheet of paper and wrote on it another word. Mary took that around. Finally he took a book and pointing to a word in it, told her to show that. Bit by bit it was dawning upon the child that words were written symbols and nothing more, that reading and writing were only a means of conveying ideas. In the light of this new interest her capacity began to develop. A few weeks later she was fined by the Commonwealth for burning her light late at night while she read! and in three months, she accomplished what, under ordinary circumstances, would have taken her two or three years.

Mr. Lane had in his turn understood—understood

the contents of the child's mind and the difficulty which had to be overcome—and his interest had kindled hers.

Unless we ourselves first of all possess both feeling and understanding, we are powerless to help.

In the introduction to her book, *How to tell Stories to Children*, Sarah Cone Bryant writes of her efforts in connection with the telling of a certain nonsense tale. For some reason it had never appealed to her as funny, though she knew that a friend of hers could tell it with such effect that her hearers became helpless with laughter. Urged constantly, however, by the same friend to make use of the story herself, she at last included it among others, on what she considered a specially suitable occasion when her audience was one with whom she was in close sympathy. She had taken, she tells us, an unusual amount of pains to bring out what she thought were the salient points; yet her audience only smiled politely, a few laughed quietly, and the most that could have been said was that the telling of the story was not a hopeless failure. Again, after further study, and yet again, she tried to tell it; but her audiences were all alike. And in her heart, she confesses, she would have been startled if they had behaved otherwise, for every time she told it, she was conscious in her soul that it seemed to her only a dull story! At last she owned her defeat to herself, and put it out of her mind.

Some time afterwards she happened to take out the notes of the story and idly look them over. Suddenly, she knew not how, she got the right point of view.

"The salt of the humour was all at once on my lips; I felt the tickle of the pure folly of it; it *was* funny. The next afternoon I told the story to a hundred or more children, and as many mothers—and the battle was won. Chuckles punctuated my periods; helpless laughter ran like an undercurrent below my narrative; it was a struggle for me to keep sober myself."

The story is a further illustration of the same truth. Miss Bryant had recognised all along, as she says, that the essence of the story lay in its humour, that the humour of the story emanated from its very exaggeration, its "absurdly illogical smoothness"; but *she could not convey it until she had herself felt it*. Until her own sense of humour was aroused, she was powerless to call forth the sense of humour which she knew to exist in her audience.

We cannot give understanding unless we first possess it: we cannot inspire unless we first of all feel. The essence of prayer is a spiritual responsiveness, a quality of the soul, a certain attitude towards God on the part of the one who prays. This we can never give unless we already have. *An understanding of prayer, an understanding of the child, and that we should ourselves truly pray*—these are the essentials if we are to help the child to pray.

But many of us are still uncertain as to what we ourselves believe about prayer: and here, as elsewhere, we fear to use our intelligence lest we should cease to believe what we thought we believed and still wish to believe. We cannot help as long as we only

half-understand, for we shall speak without conviction and teach without authority.

Many of us are almost wholly in the dark with regard to the workings of the child's mind, yet there is a whole world of difference between possessing and imparting knowledge. Can a child pray as grown folk pray? Grown folk have for the most part outgrown the concrete conceptions of their childhood. For them, God has become a Purposive Love, a Mighty Will, an Eternal Spirit—beyond all, within all. For grown folk, prayer has been determined and enriched by the experiences of a lifetime. The child cannot help but make havoc of their abstract conceptions. Confusion and unreality will result from striving to implant in him abstract conceptions for which he is not ready.

In the teaching of religion, as in the teaching of arithmetic, if we are to help the child, we must *begin* with the concrete and work slowly towards the abstract; *begin* with the known and work up to the unknown. To do this we must put ourselves in the child's place. No easy task, but without some such effort of sympathetic imagination we are unable to help him.

CHAPTER II

THE CALL FOR UNDERSTANDING

WHAT is Prayer? Prayer must be communion—communion with an unseen Friend. Do we not draw nearer in thought to the child, and at the same time deepen our own understanding of prayer, by a consideration of prayer as the natural outcome of a Divine Friendship? Friendship is as real and as necessary to a little child as to us: the thought of a Divine Friend will make an immediate appeal to him.

When we first come into contact with a very lovable person, we irresistibly desire to know him better. In the pursuit of that end we welcome anything which others, more intimate with him than we are, can tell us about him. We may even seek his friendship for ourselves. Through closer intercourse, we shall gradually come to know him better, to love him more, and there will spring up within us a desire to serve him as an expression of our love for him, a desire to be better that we may be worthier of his love. Just as a boy first thinks himself a "beast" when he has found his hero, so we, in the clearer vision born of a greater love, see our faults now as we never saw them before. A new impulse towards good is born within us, as we realise that our friendship will suffer from lack of sincerity on our part, from lack of harmony between our love and our life, even from selfishness in the enjoyment of that love. Only in so far as our love is expressed in our life *can* our friendship grow. This we know for a certainty

Our intercourse with our friend is not limited to speech. It is not even confined to those times, which may indeed be rare, when we sit with him and talk and listen. A touch of the hand, a glance of the eye, a passing thought, a momentary realisation of what it means to us to have his friendship, of what it means to us that there should be in the world a lovable man such as he—this, too, brings us into touch with him. Sometimes we have a friend to whom we have never spoken, whom perhaps we have never seen. He may even seem to us so much greater, so much better than we are that we do not dare to speak to him, we feel as if speech on our part would be presumptuous. Yet, even so, we come into touch with him in a consciousness of love, in a sense of our own unworthiness alongside of his worth, in a desire that we may be—nay, in a belief that we *can* be, just because of our love—more like what he would have us be if only we were known to him. Knowledge and love—love expressed in life—these are essential things in the highest human friendship.

That knowledge must to a certain extent be first-hand knowledge, not that which comes only from being “told about” our friend. The knowledge which begins in “telling” must increase through loving and striving. We never truly know until we love; nor truly love until we live for another.

Does not the parallel between prayer and communion with such a friend hold at every point? Is not God, the All-loving, the All-good, also our Unseen Friend? Does not a knowledge of God lead to a love for God, and a love for God to a desire for further knowledge?

Does not such knowledge begin in "telling," and increase through loving and striving? When we know and love, do we not *want* to pray, that we may know Him more? In true prayer, do we not receive a yet deeper knowledge, a still more trusting love—a love which frees us henceforward from all spiritual hesitancy, a love which for the first time reveals to us what we truly are, a love which is driven to seek an outlet in life? Does not the very continuance of that love and knowledge depend upon, as it grows out of, the expression of that love in life? Can we really know Him, who is All-Goodness, except in so far as we are ourselves striving to be good? Our communion with God is not limited to language. Closer friendship is ours when we can and do commune with Him in words. But we do not only commune with Him when we kneel and voice our petition.

Only a sense of supplication,
A sense o'er all my soul imprest
That I am weak, yet not unblest,
Since in me, round me, everywhere,
Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.

This also is prayer.

Through the wonder of a human friendship at its highest we are given a glimpse of what the Divine Friendship may become, and what we speak of sometimes as the Problem of Prayer surely disappears in the face of it.

In what kind of spirit do we go with our difficulties to a human friend? What if, in the expression of our needs, it seemed that we were asking him to do our work for us—taking advantage, so to speak, of

his love—would not the freedom of our intercourse at once be restricted? Should we not rather go to him for aspiration, for the clearer vision, which, in our need, we know that he can give; go to him for the sympathy which will rob our trouble and anxiety of all bitterness, making us strong to fight and to endure? We should not want to shift our burden, like spoiled children, on to the shoulders of a friend whom we love. We should prefer to battle with our own problems. We ought to feel ourselves robbed of the dignity of our manhood and spoiled in the perfection of our relationship with our friend, if he did for us what we know we could grow stronger in doing for ourselves. In all our conference with him, our attitude towards him should not be that of doubting supplication, but of a trust which is self-reliant, a faith which is strong.

Ought it not then to be the same in our communion with God, and in our prayers to Him? The value of our prayers surely depends, not only on the greatness of our trust, but upon the strength of our own endeavour. Our attitude in prayer should not be the expression of a desire to influence powers which are God's, but a desire to mould our wills into harmony with His.

Does not this analogy of Friendship constantly reveal fresh and deeper truths the more closely we consider it? And when those to whom experience of life has taught the true meaning of human fatherhood, add to this conception of God as a Friend, One who is at the same time *Our Father*, have we not attained to a conception of surpassing wonder and beauty, opening up a realm of infinite possibilities,

and revealing to us His perfect purpose of love?

Friendship, expanded wherever possible into the further thought of a great Fatherhood, is one which is satisfying and true to us grown folk. Should there not be in the possession of every child, simply waiting for our interpretation, somewhat of the experience upon which such an analogy is based? Certainly, as far as the children with whom we ourselves are brought into contact, it must be our own fault if they do not learn to share it.

CHAPTER III

THE CHILD'S EARLY GLIMPSES OF GOD

PRAYER to God should, as we have seen, be the spontaneous outcome of friendship, as well as its source: for the child, as for us, prayer should be communion with an unseen Father-Friend. No such communion is possible without understanding and without love. Whence can such understanding be obtained—the understanding which of necessity goes hand in hand with love?

It is evening and the baby lies in his cot, ready for sleep. His mother stands beside him, her hand holding his, her head reverently bowed. She is praying by his side, praying that God will take care of him through the coming night; that God will help him to be good in the coming years of boyhood and manhood. From the first, the sound of her voice, the sight of her face, the touch of her hand, modify in some dim way the contents of his mind, even though, as yet, he understands nothing of what they mean. Yet as she prays, night after night, week after week, this same group of impressions, received, retained, and unconsciously analysed and compared by his growing intelligence, gradually begins to stand out in his mind with a certain degree of distinctness. In the same way, he had gradually become acquainted with the various "objects" in the world around him—with his bath, his mother, his father and the rest.

But this one group of impressions connected with prayer is different from the beginning from all others,

Because when his mother *prays*, the look on her face, the sound of her voice, her attitude, the very touch of her hand are different from what they are at any other time and under any other circumstances; and to this difference the little child responds. His mother's love for God, her reverence for Him, as she prays by her child's bedside while he is yet a baby, are in some strange way communicated to him along the chords of human sympathy. Too young as yet to understand, he is not too young to *feel* as she feels.

This feeling of trust and reverence which, as a mere baby, he "catches" as it were from her, gradually, as he grows older, strengthens within him owing to other religious influences. It is aroused by the sacred music which at times she plays to him; by the solemn pealing of the organ as he stands with her by the church door. When later, with folded hands and reverently bowed head, he kneels by her side as she prays—for he is not yet old enough to pray himself—this feeling of reverence is sustained, held together, by the attitude of reverence as water is held in a cup.

The child is capable of religious feeling before he is capable of religious thought. As he grows older, feeling becomes welded with thought in an ever-closer intimacy. He realises that God is his Father; that, as well as an earthly father, we have an Unseen Father Who loves us and takes care of us all the time. Quite naturally and very often his mother speaks to him of God. Would it be other than strange if the child failed to respond? Gradually the Unseen God to Whom his mother prays begins to be not only a real Presence but a real Power, capable of helping

him. "He is a good God to take care of me like He does," one little lad used to say when he was two years old. "I love Him as much as Father and Mother, because He gave them to me," said another child about the same age.

The knowledge of these children was the outcome of their experience. Placed in a material environment, with the power to retain and to store up the impressions received from that environment, the child, out of his own experiences, step by step gains his first clear conceptions of the world in which he lives. Placed in a spiritual environment, the foundations of his spiritual knowledge are laid in his spiritual impressions.

In the first twelve months of the child's life, we are told that he learns more than in any period of twelve years later, for he lays the foundations of all his future knowledge. Then the thought of God's Presence should be woven into the texture of his life before he is aware.

Yet, because of our lack of understanding, too often we leave out of his life all early experiences of God.

CHAPTER IV

GETTING TO KNOW THE DIVINE FRIEND

BUT what if the child, even though brought up in an atmosphere of affection and early taught to pray, has been accustomed to "say prayers," which are for him a meaningless formality, without understanding and without love? What if the habit of prayer has been postponed until the child is older, either thoughtlessly, or it may be deliberately, because the parents believed it to be a mistake to impose formal prayer upon him apart from any conscious need on his part? How, then, can an understanding of God grow and love awaken?

As with the baby, so with an older child, "telling" is but the first step towards understanding; more than mere "telling" is needed if the foundation for prayer is to be sure.

Suppose we wished to arouse in such a child first a desire for converse, and then a habit of converse, with a friend at a distance who loved him dearly, and whom he had himself never seen. What if we merely "told" him of that friend and of his love, and then went on to tell him that it was his duty, now that he was old enough to understand, to write a few lines to him every night and morning, we ourselves perhaps suggesting to him what he should say, since as yet he did not know that friend well? Should we, by insisting on the duty of converse, create in him any real desire for converse? Would the communication between them through the medium of such

letters be real? Even if the habit of writing letters were formed, would the habit be worth anything, in itself, to either child or friend?

Yet is it not in some such way as this that we often seek to lay the foundations of an habitual daily communion between the child and God? The habit may be formed, but is it of value? Can there be any true communion—with a human friend or with God—without the presence first of a genuine desire for friendship? We need to arouse this desire by the manner and matter of our “telling,” to kindle his imagination, to arouse his understanding and to awaken his love. A child is quick to respond, he is ever ready to give love in return for love.

A single “telling” will probably be enough to prompt him to write letters for the first few times. But if it is desirable that letter-writing should become a habit, should we not need to continue to talk of that friend, to read together the letters which he sends us, to talk together of the letters which we ourselves are sending, until gradually, even though unseen, this friend becomes increasingly real to the child? This friend of his is our friend too, and we want him to grow very dear to him. Then, through his own daily letters, which we take care shall not be forgotten—little spontaneous productions, spelt in his own way, expressed in his own quaint language, out-pourings of his child-heart, telling of his joys and troubles, naively asking for advice—would not the child day by day come to know and to love that friend more, even in time to desire so to act that he might give him pleasure? The love which began in

our "telling" would then have grown through his own loving and striving.

Can we not, *must* we not, in some such way as this, promote the child's converse with God, telling him of this Father-Friend, wondrously good, wondrously loving, Who plans for us all, Who cares for us all, Who watches over us all ; telling him in such a way that he enters into our own love for God, our own dependence upon Him, our own consciousness of all that He has done for us ; and telling him, too, that to this loving Father we are able ourselves to speak, sharing with Him our joys, confiding to Him our troubles ? It must be a wonderful and a new thought to such a child. Love and understanding can only grow gradually.

As we continue to tell him of God ; as, in our interpretations of Nature and of Life, we, as it were, read to him from *God's* letters—the letters written in the world of Nature, the letters written in the hearts of men and women and children ; as we tell him the story of the wondrous Ministry of Christ, of His tender sympathy, and His surpassing love ; day by day we shall reveal to him more of the Father, day by day God will become increasingly real until, ere long, the child himself will desire to pray.

Whether the foundations are laid in the beginning or not till the child is older, his religion must needs have a natural basis in daily experience. Fathers, mothers and teachers must only not deliver God's message to the child, but must fit themselves to express His very Presence—*not only give the message, but be It*. The claim is stupendous, but we must dare

it. We must be able to say to the child : " We are like a very little bit of God. You know, don't you, how sorry we are when you are in pain or trouble ; how grieved we are when you do wrong, and how glad when you do right. God is ever so much sorrier. He is much more grieved and much more glad. Do you believe we are able to help you to grow good and kind, to help you to grow strong ? If you ask God to help you, He will be able to do it ever so much more. But God cannot make you good just for the asking. It would not be real goodness if you could be made good, as it were, from the outside. It wouldn't really be helping you if everything could be done for you. It would be like our doing all your sums for you instead of teaching you to do them yourselves ; or like dressing you every day even though you had grown big enough to button up your own clothes ! That way you would never grow strong and able to do things, and you wouldn't be really happy that way either."

The child will grasp this point readily enough. Norman was only five when he said " When you ask God to do anything for you, you have to do your very hardest yourself, and He does the last little bit you can't manage. If He did it all, it would spoil you."

" All that we know of one another," we can go on to tell them, " all that we know of one another, when we are our best selves, is just a little bit like knowing God, and a talk with a dear friend is just a little bit like prayer to God. We can't get to know our friend better unless we take the trouble to talk and to listen to him ; and *it is the same with God.*"

CHAPTER V

SPONTANEOUS AND FORMAL PRAYERS

It is a debated question whether the child's first prayers should be dictated to him by some grown person or should be the spontaneous outcome of his own knowledge and his own love, voiced in whatever words come naturally to him. Even among those who hold that the child should be nurtured in the religious life from his earliest infancy, there are two opposing schools of thought. The one lays stress on awe and reverence as of primary importance in the religious life, and fears lest freedom of speech should lead to familiarity of thought. Anticipating the growth of false ideas as the outcome of freedom, it would direct the child's thought in prayer in definite channels of language. The other lays stress on love as the essence of religion, and fears lest the limiting of speech should result in a limiting of intercourse. Trusting in the child's natural impulses and regarding self-expression as essential to all real intercourse, those who belong to this school are convinced that "taught prayers", regularly repeated, cannot be the child's true prayers, however rich in spiritual content the words of such prayers may be. They maintain therefore that it is as unnatural—almost as harmful—for a child to be taught in what words to pray to God as it would be to teach him in what words to speak to his earthly father.

Underlying this difference of stress between these two schools in the matter of religious training, there

is a further difference between them in general outlook, inseparably bound up with the difference of stress, and even more fundamental, for it concerns the whole interpretation of human life. The one school dwells upon the weakness rather than the strength of human nature. It therefore distrusts freedom and relies upon outward discipline as the moulding force in education. The other school believes that in all human beings—and most of all in childhood—the impulse towards good far outweighs the impulse towards evil. It therefore chooses liberty rather than external discipline for its watchword.

By each school of thought the quest for God is pursued from a standpoint so opposite that little benefit results from argument. According as we ourselves have come to know God, according to our natural temperament, we belong—perhaps unalterably—to the one school or the other. As we have learnt to believe, so we must train our child. But the customs and habits of others, whatever the basis of their authority, must never be our sole arbiter.

Belonging, as I do, to the school which stands for freedom, I want in this chapter to outline my position, not with the idea of upholding the one school of thought to the exclusion of the other, but with the hope of suggesting a fresh point of view to those who, not yet having considered the issues involved, have "taught" prayers to their children from force of habit, and are perhaps troubled by their lack of success.

What is prayer to a little child? Not merely

asking for things, even though the child asks God to help him to be good and that His blessing may rest on those he loves. For the child, prayer is communion, intercourse, speaking with God, as he would speak with a father. Do we ever need to tell our child what to say to his earthly father when he runs in to say "Good night"? Should we not feel that there was something fundamentally wrong with the child's relationship with his father, if he did not run in gladly and climb upon his knee and chatter fast about the day's doings, cuddling down so close in his arms that it seemed almost like sacrilege to interrupt their gladness when bedtime came?

This close comradeship between father and child has been the ideal which we of this generation have striven to reach. Two or three generations ago a child was taught to stand in his father's presence and address him as "Sir"; was taught, that is, to feel and show respect rather than love. Love was present in the father's heart, love often grew in the child's heart, but it was not permitted, to child or to father, to "let themselves go" in the expression of that love. To-day we believe that, through their reserve, parents were robbed of something infinitely precious. We believe also that the familiar intimacy of to-day is more potent educationally, for parent and for child, than was the more reserved parenthood of yesterday. We have found that if the companionship which grows out of love is not nipped in the bud by the frost of disillusionment but ripens with experience, it does—in our own experience—yield in due time the fruit of reverence.

This we hold to be true also of the child's relationship with God. Unless the tender homely feeling, which those of us who believe in the new freedom have gradually come to associate with fatherhood, belongs to the Divine Fatherhood, and not only to the earthly fatherhood, we believe that the lesser would exceed the greater. We believe that it was the tender reverent intimacy of the relationship of God to us as *Father*, which Christ, in contrast to the Hebrew prophets of old, felt for Himself and wanted us to understand. We believe that it was partly because this understanding came so naturally to a little child that Christ said we older folks needed to *become as little children* before we could enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. We believe further that the spontaneous prayers of children, strange and unconventional though they may sound to our unaccustomed ears, are often nearer to the heart of the Father than any prayer which we grown folk are able to dictate to them.

But neither in the child's attitude to his earthly father, nor in his attitude towards God, do we desire to leave the child wholly to his own resources. We need to provide an environment in which feelings of respect, as well as of confidence and love, shall have their place, so that the element of reverence may be sure to grow up side by side with that of affection. In this further development, we realise that not only understanding but imitation takes part.

Even those of us whose habits are matured tend, through imitation, to catch the tone of the company we are with. To an almost incredible extent this is the

case with a child. Outward expression helps to awaken the corresponding inward feeling.

For this reason, in the child's religious life as in his home life, we rely upon favouring environment rather than upon formal teaching to awaken reverence and love. If, in a home, the mother and children are loving and respectful in their attitude towards the father ; if he, in his turn, earns and retains their love and respect ; then the child will instinctively copy the attitude of others and an element of reverence will enter in. And if, through his mother's prayers by his bedside night and morning, he has been brought from the first, day by day, into contact with her reverent trust in God, by imitating outward signs he will begin to share in her inward feeling. This inward feeling will be deepened by a more complete outward expression when, a little later, he kneels by her side.

No one can create the soul in another ; we can only provide the environment in which the natural impulses of the soul will come to birth. If his mother's prayers have been part of that child's environment, his own prayers will be moulded instinctively on the model of hers, in spirit even more than in words. Yet there will have been no fixed form of prayer which he might have been led to copy, and in the repetition of which his own prayers might in time lose their emotional content.

And Thou know'st I cannot pray
To Thee in my father's way—

writes Francis Thompson in *Ex Ore Infantium*—

When Thou wast so little, say,
Couldst Thou talk Thy Father's way ?
So, a little child, come down,
And hear a child's tongue like Thy own.
Take me by the hand and walk,
And listen to my baby talk.
To Thy Father show my prayer,
(He will look, Thou art so fair)
And say : " O Father, I, Thy Son,
Bring the prayer of a little one ; "
And He will smile, that children's tongue
Has not changed since Thou wast young.

As time goes on, and the child learns gradually to utter his thoughts with greater spontaneity, confusion of thought may be revealed. When it is revealed, it can be dealt with. The repeating of set forms often enough hides a mental confusion so strange as to make much of the child's prayer take on the character of some meaningless incantation rather than an outpouring of affection. More children than we dream of attach no meaning whatever to many of the words they say. For example, " Pity mice and plicity " is a common enigma to children! A group of children during the war were taught as a " grace."—

" Father, we pray Thee to bless this our food,
That so we may love Thee, and grow strong and good.
O help us to serve Thee and give us control
That so we may please Thee in body and soul."

" Control " was interpreted as a kind of butter !

Until the child is five or six years old, with sufficient knowledge and training to enter somewhat into its meaning, even the Lord's Prayer is liable to this danger—that a form of words may cloak confusion of thought. One small child was accustomed to say night after night—" 'Harold' be Thy Name."

The prayer, or communion, of grown folk is founded upon a much wider experience of life and is therefore more enlightened than that of the child. Set forms may have been the ladder by which they first climbed. But the thoughts of grown folk are not as the thoughts of the child ; the language of grown folk cannot be the language of the child. To the child, all is concrete and the abstract non-existent. But if God is realised by him as his Father ; if, at every turn, he sees evidence of God's love just as, at every turn, he sees evidence of his earthly father's love, can we not trust him to choose his own words in prayer ? Not to trust him is not to trust the spiritual impulses within him ; and on the spontaneous activity of these feelings, his spiritual growth and progress depend.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNINGS OF PRAYER

PRAYER then is the outcome of knowledge and of love. Such a knowledge of God and a love for God are not slow in coming to birth in the child's heart, if, in his life, he has known somewhat of the happy experiences upon which alone such knowledge rests. For where love is, God is ; and the child is ever ready to give love in return for love ; ever quick to understand the thought of a Living Source of all Love behind its visible manifestation.

When he knows and loves he is ready to pray, but not before. Then if he is one of the more fortunate children brought up in a happy home, one night his mother suggests to him that he himself should pray, first reminding him of all his gladness—gladness which brings him nearer to God. Would he himself not like, now that he is bigger, to tell God how happy he is ? she asks him. Till now, his mother has spoken to God for him, as, with bowed head and folded hands, he has knelt at her knee. She was always grave and quiet when she spoke to this Unseen Father, and, child though he is, he has caught somewhat of this gravity, this quiet reverence, from her, and linked it up in his mind with his thought about God. At first, because of this, he may be a little awed at the thought of speaking to God. But God has been so good to him—he remembers all that—and even though he cannot see God, God

can hear him when he speaks ; about that he has no doubt. Shyly and quietly, and in a glow of conscious gratitude, which it is good to be able to express, come the child's first words : " Dear Father, thank you for making me happy. Please make everybody happy. Amen." Gradually this first shyness passes away, and for a while, at any rate until he is a good bit older, speech comes to him more and more easily. Naturally and spontaneously he begins to tell God of his joys, to confide in Him his troubles, to ask Him for His help. " Please take care of me to-night, dear Father, and don't let me be frightened in the dark." " Please help me to be a better mother to my dolly, 'cos I'm not a bit the right sort of mother now." " Please help me not to grumble to-morrow, but it's the first day of the holidays, and you know, dear Father, it's always hardest on the first day." " Thank you for all the lovely things you send us—thank you for mothers and fathers. Thank you for books, for toys, for babies, for flowers, for houses, for—heaps of things ! "

When God is first known and loved, the child's thoughts about God are wondrously simple. Geoffrey was nine when he prayed : " Thank you for trying to make us all happy, and please make yourself happy too, if you can ; and if you can't, don't worry ; " and Mary was the same age when she hoped God would have " a good night " as well as herself. " It didn't matter my saying that, Mother, did it ? " she whispered. " I love God, that's why I hoped He'd have a good night."

Responsive children, brought up under happy

circumstances, are ready to express themselves in prayer by the time they are between two and three years old, but there is no uniform period at which every child is ready. Some respond to their spiritual environment rapidly, others slowly. Consequently we need have no anxiety if prayer is delayed, and all forcing should be avoided. A capacity for religious life is innate in all, though the period when response is complete varies according to the fineness and depth of the child's moral nature and the fullness of his power to imagine the Unseen. Some children, lacking in the power of imagination, find the very realisation of an Unseen Father difficult. In others, unusually independent or self-centred, the realisation of a Father does not awaken a responsive love. Others, though "knowing" God as well as loving Him, though conscious of their need for Him, are "shy" at the thought of themselves speaking to Him, as the result of an imagination which is morbid. Only gradually, as such children gain confidence, can they find comfort for themselves in prayer.

The age at which the child himself is ready to pray can only be determined by the stage of his development. Feeling is essential to all prayer, and care must be taken that prayers are never "said" as a mere outward form only.

For this reason, it may be better at first not even to teach the child to repeat regularly Our Lord's Prayer. Later, when he has grown accustomed to speaking to God in his own words; when too he has learnt to know and to love our Lord and has begun to understand that it is only through Him that we know God

in the way we do, as a Father Who cares for us, His children—then, what can be more natural than to add at the end of his own prayer the words which our Lord Himself has taught? “All this, dear Father,” the child can now add in conclusion, “I ask because Jesus taught me to ask, Jesus Who taught us how to pray, saying ‘Our Father which art in Heaven,’ etc.” Never as a mere form of words only, but always slowly, reverently and thoughtfully, the child can be taught to say these words. As the reverent attitude of the body has power to engender in the soul a corresponding feeling, so through the whole-hearted saying of such words as these, somewhat of the spiritual attitude which they embody becomes for the time the child’s own attitude. Charged with emotion, expressing—in a few simple words—love, trust, reverence, gratitude, dependence, aspiration and consecration, this prayer—the most selfless prayer ever breathed—interprets for us all our inmost feelings, inspires our highest efforts, and can never be outgrown.

I am sure that the dawn of religion is brightest when the child comes to a knowledge of God in the very beginning of his life, as easily and as naturally as he comes to a knowledge of his own mother. Yet sometimes all teaching is omitted, either through neglect or through ignorance on the mother’s part; or it is deliberately postponed until the child is older.

If the mother and the father in the home are unable for any reason to enter into this side of their children’s lives, then the school must take the place of the home, and the child win there his first intimate and conscious understanding of God. But, whether

at home or in school, the general process of spiritual growth follows the same lines :—

Knowledge of God and love for God can only be acquired by the slow, and for the most part unconscious, sifting-out of repeated experiences of God.

All that it is in the mother's or the teacher's power to do is to provide those experiences and choose wisely times and seasons for their spiritual interpretation.

Until love is awakened, as well as knowledge gained, the child is not ready, as we have seen, to pray by himself.

“ We have asked God to retire into the back parlour nowadays,” someone once said, referring to the religious reticence of the more leisured classes, “ and we feel as if we ought to apologise whenever He comes into the front room.” Is there not some truth in the expression ? Does not this reticence of ours make it more difficult for some of us to give to our children the natural religion which they need ?

Where religion is expressed simply and naturally in life, the seeds of understanding, whether sown at home or in school, are sown in a fertile soil.

CHAPTER VII

HELPING AND HINDERING

THE child's religion is based on experience: this experience we have realised it is in our power to provide.

In the earlier chapters, we have considered a home in which the opportunities for religious growth were not only recognised but fully utilised. The school provides similar opportunities. The Day School possesses even ampler opportunities of laying the foundation of the child's religious life than does the Sunday School, if only the teacher realises and makes use of her opportunities. For five hours, for five days in every week, in so far as she shows interest in the child, sympathetic understanding and unfailing patience—the patience which has its root in love; in so far as, through her quiet expectation of goodness, she gradually makes the children better and happier—she is awakening in them moral and spiritual response, and she is leading each one of them to a knowledge of God along the only path by which such knowledge can be gained.

Moreover, every teacher who makes an effort to understand the intellectual difficulties of any child or helps that child to solve them, is creating a feeling of confidence that there is a solution to other difficulties as well. The sympathy which underlies her efforts creates a further bond between them which is the basis of love. Confidence and love are the very foundations of religion.

Every teacher who, by careful preparation, succeeds in gaining the interest of her pupils in any subject whatever, is, by that means, building up within the child's mind a readiness to appreciate in the world in which he lives order and forethought. This too is part of the material on which both mental and spiritual growth depend.

All such teachers—and their number is legion—are continuing the work of the mother, or taking her place, in extending the foundations of the child's knowledge of God. In this sense, whether teachers take their part in formal religious instruction or not, all—consciously or unconsciously—are religious teachers, extending or retarding the Kingdom of Heaven in the School, laying or undermining the foundations without which neither Church nor Sunday School can build up, within the mind of the child, a house of prayer.

Every experience—whether at school or at home—which contradicts such teaching is bound to arrest the child's response. To obtain the fullest response to such teaching, all we can do is to dissipate any contradictory experiences which may already exist in the child's mind with a permeating sense of love and trust.

Even in a happy home the child is often faced with contradictions. We tell him that God is like a father, like a mother; that God always understands, is always loving. Yet we so often misunderstand; so often lose our patience; so often arbitrarily command or arbitrarily punish.

We realise that the essence of prayer is a certain

spiritual responsiveness, a responsiveness which we believe to be the natural inheritance of every child to a greater or less extent. We realise too that we have no power to call forth and develop this responsiveness, except in so far as we show ourselves to be spiritually responsive, for on this the child's spiritual experience must be based. Yet even in the home, many of us are at cross purposes in the religious upbringing of our children. For we do not speak to them of "saying their prayers," or of "hearing" their prayers, in much the same way as we speak to them of "saying" or "hearing" their lessons? We mothers sometimes even say, "Come and say your prayers to me now"—to *me*! Children have been punished for refusing to "say their prayers," or punished because they did not at once become quiet when they knelt down to pray, and the spirit of mischief which had been rampant all the time they were getting into bed was not immediately quelled. Can we ourselves always pray the minute we are on our knees, while the echoes of our eager, busy life are still ringing in our ears?

I have sometimes wondered whether the regular saying of "grace" may not be a puzzling thing to many thoughtful children. Is food so much more important than anything else in our lives that we should thank God for it specially three times a day? By no means infrequently the child dislikes part of the food before him, yet in spite of his dislike he has been told to thank God for it in his "grace." If he has his meals downstairs with the grown folk, he may even hear them make complaints! Yet thanks have

been given to God for the food of which the elders have complained. The cook, or the butcher, or the greengrocer is *blamed*; to God, *thanks* are given! The ways of grown folk must often seem strangely incomprehensible to the child! He is told that food is a "gift" from God, yet he is called "greedy" if he speaks much of his enjoyment of it. Expressions of delight are not regarded as a weakness where other "gifts" are concerned! "Grace" before meals is of the nature of prayer, yet children are at times removed from the table screaming, consequently upon their refusal to say their "grace." Is it possible to nourish in the child a right attitude towards God—to inculcate in him a habit of communion—as long as these things continue? Yet such things are done, done even to-day, in homes where the mother believes herself to be very religious, and it is just because she believes in her religion so strongly that she makes grace at meals, and prayers night and morning, part of her life's discipline. This is too much like the regular taking of medicine under the doctor's orders. Is this done because we grown folk have forgotten what it means to be a child? Or is it because, even though grown folk themselves pray, they have not thought out the principles which underlie their prayers?

Similar contradictions confront the child at school. It is open to question whether the experiences gained by the child from our present system of giving marks may not be out of harmony with our religious teaching. We tell of a God Who appreciates our desires and understands our efforts, Who does not judge us

according to our outward attainment. Yet, as teachers, we give high marks for a comparatively small effort on the part of a brilliant or "smart" child, and let the painstaking and prolonged efforts of a slower child for the most part pass unnoticed. We tell the children that our powers are given us to use for others and not for ourselves; that the essence of right living is mutual helpfulness and co-operation. Yet we lay an embargo upon co-operation in *work* and encourage the spirit of competition in the classroom. Christ said that the first should be last and the last first. He counted the widow's mite as worth more than all the gold in the Treasury. Yet, at school, it appears as if marks are regarded as a criterion of desert as well as of intellectual capacity. The giving and entering up of marks may be helpful to teachers in the formation of their private judgments of progress and capacity, but if the child's experience is to be in harmony with our religious teaching, would it not be wiser for the children themselves not to know them? For children only attain to a knowledge of God through the gradual and unconscious sifting out of repeated experiences of His agents and His messengers. The more closely all the experiences of the child harmonise with our teaching, the more ready and permanent will be his response.

The religious teaching given at school, commonly spoken of as "religious knowledge," is still often very different from this "finding of God in life."

A year or two ago, in a school where the educational standard was of a high level, I had an interesting experience, taking a special course of lessons on

"The Life and Teaching of Jesus" with a small group of girls of ages varying from twelve to fifteen. The group was composed of girls who were supposed not to be clever enough to be sent in for any public examination, but they had been taught "Scripture" at school on the same lines as those who, in the natural course of events, would be entered for the "Religious Knowledge" paper in the College of Preceptors and the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations. My object was not to attempt to continue their teaching on examination lines—in the examination sense they already had a fair amount of "religious knowledge." What I wanted to do was to discover the connection between their experience of life and their religious faith, and to help them, if I could, to deepen and widen that connection, that their faith might grow and become increasingly a motive force for action. I found that, to them, "religious knowledge" was one thing and the experience of their own lives another. In the "cup-board" of their minds, the two were kept in almost wholly separate compartments. According to their written answers to questions which no one but myself saw, only one of them had ever realised that God was "near" and that was on the eve of her mother's operation. They had no idea as to where or how they could "see" God. "In his written word in the Bible" was the only suggestion forthcoming. They had never "seen" God in the wonder and beauty of Nature, in the love of father and mother or teacher, in the smile on the faces of their comrades. But Christ took just the familiar experiences of

everyday life of those who were listening to Him and helped them—as children are helped by a teacher to combine sounds and make a word—to spell out the meaning of those experiences. He took the lilies in the field, the sheep lost on the hills, the death of a sparrow, a marriage feast, a son wasting his money, the growth of the mustard seed, the baking of bread—and the Word spelt GOD.¹

See *The Religion of a Little Child*, published by the Pilgrim Press.

CHAPTER VIII

HELPING THE UNLOVED CHILD

It is the children who come from homes where, owing to a lack of ideals or the pressure of poverty or of work, there is no spiritual outlook in life; where there is an absence of moral upbringing; an absence even of love—it is these children who present the gravest difficulties. For them, religious training has been neglected before they came to school; many have even been morally “twisted” and bent in the wrong direction; many have been from the first mere “incidents” in the lives of their parents and have never seen true human fatherhood and true human motherhood. How can they have seen the Reality for which this stands? They have had no *experience* of the love of man on which to base their first glimpses of the love of God.

John was not quite seven years old. Badly clothed, ill nourished and far from clean, he had the reputation of being one of the naughtiest boys in his Form. One day a new teacher was put in charge of the Form. John's behaviour was so markedly bad that she asked him to remain behind when the others left. At the end of the morning, all the children filed out. John apparently had gone with them. Undecided as to what to do, the teacher stood for a few moments thinking. A sound reached her from a far corner behind the blackboard. Turning, she saw John cowering. As she moved towards him, he cried out

in terror, "Don't hit me, Teacher, don't hit me, don't hit me!" If she had told John of God as of an Unseen Father, what thoughts would be linked up in his mind with the word "Father"? Fear, anxiety, a pitiful sense of insecurity; not joy, confidence and love.

Religion, we have urged, must be based upon experience: again and again let us repeat it. What experience have such children as these? In speaking to such children of a Father—even a Heavenly Father—we are of necessity speaking of that which wakens up bitter experience. True fatherhood is as yet beyond their reach. To tell of God's Fatherhood is as if we tried to tell them what was meant by the ocean when they knew nothing of the waves of the seashore.

Only through the experience of the power of waves by the shore, can such children reach out to the larger conception of the power of the ocean. Only by means of the known, can they attain to a knowledge of the unknown.

It is the same with religion. Men and women and children who are striving to be their best selves are in relation to God what the waves by the shore are to the vast ocean. Children such as these have not yet known men and women and children *at their truest and best*; and until they have experienced this, they can possess no knowledge of the essential human qualities by means of which they can begin to understand the Divine.

When we tell such children of a God of Love, a God Who is a Father and a Friend, a God Whose Love works in and through human beings, a God Who cares, Who always understands, Who is always merciful, a God Who wants us to talk to Him night and morning

in our prayers, we are speaking to them in unknown words, using language which lies almost wholly outside their experience. It is almost as if we were endeavouring to teach them to do multiplication sums without first having made them familiar with the conception of what numbers stand for.

As we should need to take the child to the sea shore before he could even begin to understand the power of the ocean, so we must bring into his experience human friendship, human understanding, human love, and the power they possess of awakening in him a desire for human intimacy and a willingness to serve others, before he can even begin to understand Infinite Love, Perfect Holiness, the dedication of a life, the desire for prayer and Divine Friendship, which is their natural significance.

From what we *are* then, infinitely more than from anything we *say*, such children will get the foundation of their ideas on religion. For religion implies, in the first place, first-hand experience of God's goodness, which can only come through their experience of human goodness; it implies, in the second place, an attitude towards God in us, which cannot be taught in words unless it has first of all been shown in actions.

I have known a day school of four hundred infants, in one of the poorest districts in one of our Northern towns, where the head mistress is "guide, philosopher and friend" to every single child. The few whom she knows to be laggards she calls for on her way to school, waiting for them in the street while they slip on their scanty garments and hurriedly snatch a piece

of bread for their breakfast ; providing the dirty ones with hot water, towels, and soap, when they get to school, that they may start the day clean and fresh. Every week she sits in judgment upon them all in turn. Each child is called upon to declare whether she has had her weekly bath, her head washing, her change of garments, and any child who has no change is provided with one by the united efforts of the others—not in any spirit of superior “charity,” but in the spirit of mutual helpfulness which each is expected to show towards the others on all occasions. This care and attention in the little details of their physical life—care and attention such as would have been their lot in a good home with the right sort of mother—she extends to their mental, moral and religious life. She believes in them, she trusts them, she loves them, and, as the direct outcome of this belief and this loving trust, she directs their impulses gradually into better channels. The children go to her for comfort and advice, go to her to confess their faults, go to her to tell of their joys. All is not “right with the world ” in which they live, but while Teacher is there, “ God is in His Heaven ” for them. Through her, they begin to know Him. Their religion is very simple, very real, very intimate. They speak of God as their Father and of Jesus as their Friend, quite naturally, and whenever it is mentioned that any of the children, or even the teachers, are in trouble and anxiety, an added fervour in the children’s prayers is noticeable. The lack of love and sympathy in their own homes—combined with their consciousness of the comfort of the love which they have found

at school—leads them to look for the love of God and depend more on the friendship of Jesus. Their prayers are really intimate talks with a loving Father.

Watching the waves on the shore, such children can learn of the power of the ocean.

“It is only through our mysterious human relationships, through the love and tenderness and purity of mothers and sisters and wives, through the strength and courage and wisdom of fathers and mothers and teachers that we can come to a knowledge of Him, in Whom alone the love and the tenderness, and the purity and the strength and the courage and the wisdom of all these dwell for ever in perfect fullness.”¹

Soon after the beginning of the Great War, “children’s corners” were set apart in many of our churches. Here children cherished the mementos of those whom they loved who were “at the front.” Here they learnt to come and pray. If part of the church were always set aside for them and the churches in all denominations always open for them, would this not help the children to pray? A few of these “corners” have been continued. Set forms of prayer are sometimes placed in them for the children’s use. Would it not be even better to place there, instead of these set forms, a book of “Thoughts” which would speak to them as a mother in a spiritual home is accustomed to speak to her children, which would contain poems, etc., such as she would naturally read to them. A single thought, a single poem, would be a prompting to prayer.

¹ See *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*.

The book might contain some such "thoughts" as these :—

God loves you dearly. He loves you more than anybody else loves you, however loving, here upon earth.

God is glad when you do what is right, and grieved when you do wrong.

God wants you to be happy, kind and honest, truthful and unselfish.

If you want to be happy and kind, honest, truthful and unselfish, ask God and He will help you.

If you are sorry when you have done wrong, tell God, and He will forgive you.

Although God is unseen, He hears you when you pray : and He understands.

Jesus Christ, Who came from God, said that God wants us to talk to Him and tell Him everything.

Sometimes God does not answer our prayers in the way we want or expect, because He knows better than we do. But He does answer our prayers in the way that is best for us.

It helps you when you come into Church to pray, and when you pray at home—night and morning—if you close your eyes and kneel. It helps you because then your thoughts are not disturbed by what is going on around you. It helps you because, when you kneel, it makes you remember God's greatness and God's goodness.

Close your eyes, and kneel down, and pray.

When you have prayed, say " All this, dear Father, I ask because Jesus taught me to ask, Jesus Who taught us how to pray, saying :

"Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation ; But deliver us from evil : For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.'"

When you have prayed to God, say to yourself
"I love God. What can I do to show my love?"

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE CHILD GAINS BY PRAYER

THE sound of a fall, a sudden cry of distress, pathetic sobs, the hurried rush of eager little feet, and then a voice crying out to his mother: "Your healing hand, Mother—your healing hand." On the bruised knee, the mother lays her hand. The sobs lessen. A smile lights up the little tear-stained face. The pain has gone !

Thus, not once, but almost daily, are nursery miracles wrought. A bruised knee, a cut hand, an aching head—all are made better, as if by magic, by that mother's "healing hand," as the child interprets it.

The clock strikes seven. For more than half an hour the child had been settled for sleep. Then a sound of stifled sobs brings his mother to his bedside. "What is it, Boy? What is troubling you?" she asks. To-night it was the Dark. Something in the corner seemed to move the curtains near the window and make a strange noise. He was frightened and couldn't sleep. He fancied he could hear the strange noise, even when he crept right down under the blankets and pulled them tightly over his head. His mother lit the light and showed that nothing was there. They talked a little. Then she tucked him up, put out the light and described for him an imaginary "picture" with which he might go to sleep. "Shut your eyes tightly, Boy," she said, "Can you see a wood, green in the spring time? It

slopes up a hill. It is carpeted with moss and ferns. There are heaps and heaps of bluebells too, waving in the wind. Inside the cup of every bluebell, peeping out, you can just see a tiny, tiny fairy !” Gradually the “ picture ” grew before his eyes. When it was completed, she whispered, “ Don’t move. Just lie quite still and look at your ‘ picture.’ You’ll be asleep before you know where you are ! ” And she stole out of the room.

Yet another night, when he remembered that he had told a “ lie ” at tea-time. His mother had believed him and it seemed all right at the time. He hadn’t thought about it any more, till, suddenly, it had come back into his mind after he had been left alone to go to sleep. Then he began to feel “ a horrid pain inside.” The thought wouldn’t go, and the pain wouldn’t go either. It got worse and worse, till he began to sob. Then his mother came. Again they talked, and again she left him comforted.

What lies behind this power to heal pain, to take away fear, to soothe the ache of remorse ? Does every mother possess and use this power of comforting her child ? Sometimes a loved nurse takes the place of father or mother. Sometimes it is someone outside the house altogether. Sometimes there is no one ; fears and anxieties have to be conquered or suppressed by the child himself ; his hurts have to wait for healing till Time heals them. “ Mother was always so busy, there was no time for tenderness,” a girl said once, speaking of her home as she remembered it in her childhood. Love and understanding take time to develop. They come into being and

grow strong as the result of small duties shared, small pleasures enjoyed together, quiet talks "about things" at odd, unexpected moments, cosy bed-time chats when the child is

"quite good in bed

Kissed and sweet and Thy prayers said."

It is through constant intercourse like this that understanding gradually grows—understanding of one another, and, through one another, understanding of the world, so full of puzzles and surprises. As understanding grows, love deepens.

Only when there is this mutual love, this mutual understanding, can the mother's touch heal pain, her presence inspire confidence. Every little child needs a mother's help: but the mother can only satisfy his needs when there exists between them a relationship of this kind—intimate, tender, strong and understanding. This relationship is only possible when there has been a habit of close communion. In this communion, the child must do his share. It is not enough that the mother should show her love to him, that she should reveal herself to him. It is necessary that he should also show his love for her, he also must unburden his heart and tell his thoughts to her. *Healing, protecting, comforting, guiding do not depend on the attitude of mind of one person alone: they require a certain attitude of mind on the part of two persons—the giver and the receiver.* Before a mother, father or friend can give help, the child must desire and seek for help. Guidance cannot be given, unless it is desired. Unless protection and comfort are sought, they cannot be given.

It is the same with the child's communion with God as it is with his communion with those who love him here on earth. He must realise his needs and his dependence : he must learn the habit of communion. The child needs a God Who is always with him ; Who knows his inmost thoughts ; understands him ; loves him ; " keeps care of him " as the child expresses it ; and helps him when he is trying to be good. Then he learns how to pray. *The feeling of confidence, the consciousness of guidance, the sense of protection, which the child can gain from God, rest upon the fact of his communion with God. They are the outcome of his prayer.* " Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ; for everyone that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." The child must do his part. The child must give up his self-will and self-sufficiency before he can receive the blessing.

This need for someone to " keep care " of us, to comfort us and guide us, is inseparable from early childhood. Something of it persists all through our lives when we realise all that is around us. We feel our helplessness—feel that, after all, like little children, we are in need of this protection.

But as the child grows older, it is not well if he rests content with a permanent attitude of dependence. Sometimes a mother, in the joy and satisfaction she experiences in " doing things " for her child, keeps him dependent on her too long. Content with doing everything herself, she asks for nothing in return. And so she " spoils " her child, making him selfish.

She may even in time lose the trust and the love which once were hers, because she claims from him no service. If the child loves his mother, he must express his love by doing things for her ; and though not always very willing, he will learn by his experience that he comes to love his mother more through the giving of help, even though it is sometimes against the grain. Love grows by what it gives more than by what it receives. That is one of the great lessons that he must learn, and only experience will teach him. Only in so far as love is expressed in action, can that love grow. It will be our fault if we give our child a conception of life which makes the realisation of this difficult.

We must never lose sight of the fact that feeling is given to us for a definite purpose—to make ideas and judgments potent in action. Feeling which is not thus realised in an act makes for weakness rather than strength, for sentimentality rather than power.

This experience of the child's in connection with human love he is also capable of realising early in connection with his love for God. He can understand that it is not enough for him just to pray and then rise from his knees and forget ; understand that prayer is not an end in itself but a means to an end—service ; understand that, as well as comfort and enlighten, *prayer must stir and strengthen and inspire him to action.*

The ultimate test of the value of prayer lies in the conduct of the one who prays. “ Not everyone that saith unto me ‘ Lord, Lord ’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my

Father which is in heaven." The child's daily prayers must be expressed in his daily endeavour.

"You love God, then how can you show your love?" the mother must ask of the child. And we must help him to understand that he is showing his love for God, when, for His sake, he controls his temper when he is angry ; when he forgives someone who has treated him unjustly or unkindly ; when he tells the truth when an untruth would come in " handy " and save him from disgrace ; when he stays at home and helps his busy mother when he is longing to run out and play ; when he tries to do his best all the time, in school and at home. We teach him that God judges not by the work accomplished, but by the effort put forth, that He understands the motive behind the " trying " ; and that God knows, as no one else can ever know, the extent of that " trying." We teach him that God is always near, that God will help him to remember. He knows that he does not need always to kneel and fold his hands before he prays.

" And dost Thou like it best that we
Should join our hands to pray to Thee ?
I used to think, before I knew,
The prayer not said unless we do,"

he might have said once with Francis Thompson. But now he knows that he can often pray to God without kneeling, without even closing his eyes. For he can commune with God as he sits at his desk in the schoolroom, as he walks along the street, even in the middle of a game, for he knows that he is praying to God whenever he opens his heart to God.

If his love and understanding have grown as they should have grown, his prayers now will express his gratitude for what has already been given to him : they will not degenerate into requests for immediate gifts, like the requests of a spoiled child. His desire will be to give love in return for love ; to live more nearly as God would have him live.

It rests with us, in the beginning—father, mother and teachers—not only to deliver God's message to the child but so to shape our lives that they reveal His very Presence. It rests with us not only to give the message but to show it forth in our lives.

When the child understands, it rests with him also. In a whole-hearted service alone can true prayer be rendered and love expressed.

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